

Excerpt from *ACSM Fitness Book*, Third Edition, by American College of Sports Medicine

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**Your Self-Assessment Plan
From Chapter 3: Getting Ready to Exercise**

Now that we have had an overview of what is in this chapter, let us turn our attention in some detail to the first mental task you need to undertake to begin properly on the road to becoming a regular exerciser: self-assessment of where you are in your life, in terms of exercising, now. The mental tasks are connected with one another and with the ongoing process of behavior change in a continuous, self-reinforcing, feedback loop. Self-assessment, as we shall see, is closely connected to goal setting. The elements of self-assessment at this level are of your mind, the condition of your body as you see it, and of your previous experience. You want to ask yourself several questions:

- What is it about my body and mind that I am unhappy with that could be positively affected by exercising regularly?
- What is it that I might or do want to change? And why?
- Would I really like to change, even if it means giving up something I am accustomed to?
- Do I think that I can mobilize the mental strength (and it does take mental strength —there are no magic bullets to significantly change a personal health-related behavior), if that is what I want or need to do?
- What is it that I like about my body? Don't like? Would like to change?
- What is my body self-image, truly? Does it at all correspond to reality as others tell me that reality is?
- Am I being realistic about this?
- What has my previous experience with personal health behavior change been? Good? Bad? Some success? None? Will that help me this time around? What can I learn from experience that will help this time?

As you ask yourself these questions, think intrinsically: What is your image of yourself? How do you think of yourself—good-looking? Attractive? Not attractive? Healthy? Unhealthy? What do you see when you look in the mirror? What kinds

of feelings do those images elicit? And when you see, for instance, “fat,” do others say that that is a true reflection of reality? If you are planning to exercise to help in weight loss or simply to shape up a currently out-of-shape body, will you be able to use the facts that smaller clothing now fits and that your waist is getting smaller (that’s at least smaller, if not small) as measures of success, rather than scale weight (which might or might not change much, even as you are redistributing body mass)?

How much weight would you have to lose to get below the upper limit of the normal weight range for your age, height, and sex? Would that make you truly happier or might you feel the urge to lose even more weight? If you are going to exercise primarily for weight loss, is your true goal to become really thin rather than somewhat thinner? Are you in reality looking for the “perfect body,” something few of us could achieve, even if there were such a thing? And if so, why? Answering these questions will be important in defining your long-term goals and mobilizing your motivation.